

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A20WASHINGTON POST
24 October 1986

\$100 Million Contra Aid About to Start Flowing

Goal Is to Make Sandinistas 'Cry Uncle'

By Joanne Omang
Washington Post Staff Writer

The White House yesterday was preparing for the formal inauguration of a \$100 million program of renewed U.S. covert military and logistical aid to Nicaraguan rebels, hoping it will help them make the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua "cry uncle" sometime in the future.

The expected executive order, made possible by legislation President Reagan signed last Saturday, will end two years in which the rebels, known as contras, have survived on arms and supplies from a network of private supporters who operated here and abroad with encouragement from every level of the administration.

The package makes \$60 million available to Reagan immediately and another \$40 million next Feb. 15. Administration officials have said that if all goes as planned in the coming year, escalated military activity by the contras will be visible throughout Nicaragua as they grow in number and as the Nicaraguan government "begins to crack."

However, no one predicts that the government will fall by next October, and all sides expect the administration to request increased aid next year. Reagan has said he wants the Sandinistas "to cry uncle," but he has not spelled out what that means. Other officials said increased contra pressure will force the Sandinistas either to leave office or to democratize their Marxist government, halt repression of the press and allow political dissent.

After long debate over those objectives, Congress authorized Reagan to spend up to \$70 million on military aid to the rebels, \$27 million on nonlethal aid such as medicine, clothing and food, and \$3 million on the contras' human rights enforcement office.

Another \$300 million in economic aid will be divided among Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. In addition, the omnibus spending measure Congress approved includes \$4.3 million for a "contingency facility" for the expanding U.S. presence at Palmerola Air Base in Honduras.

Reagan has promised not to dip into the Central Intelligence Agency's contingency funds, but millions of dollars worth of intelligence gathered under other intelligence community funding will continue to be made available to the contras.

Although the aid was debated openly in Congress and voted publicly, the contras' portion is authorized to be provided through clandestine means arranged by the U.S. intelligence community, and neither the account books nor the delivery procedures will be made public.

However, officials close to the House and Senate intelligence committees, which have jurisdiction over covert military action, said the CIA has agreed with the committees on detailed procedures for accounting "for every last cent" of the assistance.

Officials said all sides hope to avoid the partisan acrimony over bookkeeping that accompanied covert expenditures in the early days of the program, from 1982 to 1984, and that created controversy over last year's \$27 million program of overt nonmilitary aid to the rebels.

"It is a great relief to us" to have the program approved, said Bosco Matamoros, Washington spokesman for the largest rebel group, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force. It is part of the umbrella United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO), which claims to have 20,000 seasoned fighters and new recruits awaiting arms and training.

"We are very glad we are no longer a political instrument here. We have come of age," Matamoros said.

He said the contras "will not discourage" private aid from continuing to flow, although senior administration officials have said they would like to avoid the headache of coordinating the new operation with assorted volunteer resupply efforts.

Sources close to the program said Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, has been given overall responsibility for coordinating U.S. aid to the contra effort. Fred C. Ikle, undersecretary of defense for policy, said yesterday the Pentagon "normally helps the president on covert action," especially in training and military equipment.

Rebel sources said training for contra officers and special commando units was expected to be given in Puerto Rico and at Fort Bragg, N.C., headquarters of the Army Green Berets, at a cost of about \$20 million. One source confirmed a report in The Miami Herald that Great Swan Island, about halfway between the southern tip of Florida and the northern tip of Honduras, will be used as a transshipment point for supply loads, along with the island of El Tigre off Honduras' Pacific coast.

New military equipment is expected to include surface-to-air missiles, armed helicopters and transport planes, boats and trucks. Government military bases in Honduras and El Salvador have been used in the past as supply depots, according to contra and private aid sources, and are expected to continue in that role.

The contras are also expected to set up a new clandestine radio station, more powerful and sophisticated than their current one, to broadcast word of their exploits into Nicaragua.

Sen. David F. Durenberger (R-Minn.), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said in an interview he expects the contras to make gains in organizational ability, training and equipment handling in the coming year. "In no way, in my opinion, will they be holding any part of Nicaragua" in the way that leftist guerrillas hold territory in El Salvador that government troops hesitate to enter, Durenberger said.

In two years, holding territory "would be the best we could hope for," he added. That step could allow the United States to recognize the contras as a new government.

However, "by 1988, when Nicaraguans are killing Nicaraguans, you will see more Americans involving themselves on the other side," helping the Sandinistas, Durenberger said. "That's what happened in Vietnam, and regardless of what anybody says, this is Vietnam," he added.

"That will make it a factor in the presidential campaign [of 1988] . . . and so far I have a hard time finding anybody in my state who understands what we're doing."

Durenberger said the administration's chief task will be instilling motivation in the contra recruits. "That will only happen when they put together an operation that demonstrates to each Nicaraguan that his fellow Nicaraguans have no confidence in the Sandinistas," he said, "and we can only do that by being a lot more subtle in our tactics than we are. It's a long haul."
